

Runaway prevention

The myth about runaways is that they are not at risk because they've chosen to leave home. The truth is that kids aren't safe by themselves on the streets.

If you think your child might be at risk of running away, please call the Polly Klaas® Foundation at 800-587-4357. Our caseworkers can help you take steps to improve your relationship with your child—so kids stay home. It's worth almost any amount of effort.

From our files—one of our saddest stories (names have been changed):

One February, 16-year-old Jessica and her 19-year-old boyfriend, Mark, left home to run away to Florida. For three weeks, Jessica and Mark lived on the streets.

In mid-March, Jessica called home to ask for money for the trip home. She picked up the money that afternoon. Mark called his mother a week later to say that he and Jessica were doing fine and were heading home. They planned to make a stop in North Carolina to visit a relative.

Two days later, Mark's body was found in Marion County, FL near the railroad tracks. The search for Jessica intensified but there were no clues. During the next three years, the Polly Klaas® Foundation did everything possible to keep Jessica's case before the public and to help bring her home. We distributed thousands of flyers, put a banner on our website, and made a place for Jessica in our We Still Care program.

Three years later an inmate on death row in Texas provided a map directing law enforcement officials to Jessica's body. He told police that he met Jessica and Mark on the day of Mark's last call. They had decided to hop a grain car together and find work picking oranges. He killed both Jessica and Mark that same day.

Kids usually run from an intolerable family situation or to find or get something they don't have at home. Some of the warning signs are:

- Arguments, yelling, hurt feelings and failure to agree
- Impulsive or irrational behavior—either yours or your child's
- Involvement with an antisocial peer group
- Child abuse in the family
- Alcohol or other drug use by the family or child
- Divorce, separation or death in the family

800-587-4357



What you can do

- Support your child's needs to mature and seek independence.
- Defend your children openly against harassment or verbal abuse of any kind.
- Start working to minimize angry conflict and improve communication.
- Stay calm and don't respond with anger or name-calling, even if your child is yelling.
- Avoid interrupting when your teen is talking.
- If you get overwhelmed when talking with your teen, say, "I'm upset. I need a break to think about this." Take that break, do something calming, and then come back to talk again.

For more information, check out some of the many books available on communicating with your child. Your librarian can help you find them.

Seek help to deal with family conflict for your child and yourself. The Polly Klaas® Foundation can refer you to professionals in your area.

Call 800-587-4357.